

## Mary Magdalene

Of all the women introduced to us through the gospels, perhaps Mary Magdalene is the most interesting. In the musical Jesus Christ Superstar, the relationship between Jesus and Mary is portrayed as intimate and perhaps sensual. From time to time, writers hypothesise that they married. Historically, perhaps because it suited male writers not content to embrace a woman as a disciple, the church has relegated her to a needy, shadowy, sinful woman with a very dubious past. Mary Ellen Ashcroft writes, "A church, distancing itself from the egalitarian model practised by Jesus and the primitive church found Mary Magdalene's centrality a problem. The great church father Origen complained that Mary Magdalene was a 'wholly unsuitable first witness.'" (Spirited Women p.12)



Mary is a wonderful character, a role model of faith and discipleship. Though it is not always easy to know exactly which Mary is being referred to in the New Testament accounts, she still emerges as a leader, witness and disciple who has marvellous empathy for the spirit of Jesus, seeming to sense how to respond to him, how to read him, and what is required of her in his presence.

In this study, we will look at the way Mary Magdalene related to Jesus, looking to find in her an example of the way to come to Christ in faith.

### Extravagant love – The anointing of Jesus

It is sometimes difficult to know whether the various writers of the gospels are recounting the same story, event or encounter, whether they pick up phrases and words from oral traditions circulating in their community and apply them to a particular person or situation, or whether they know of a person and a story, and assume that they are one and the same. This is certainly a relevant question when we consider one of the most famous stories of the New Testament – the anointing of Jesus. Is there one story weaving its way through the four accounts? Is there just one woman being described or could there be two? How are we to understand the different nuances of each account? For the sake of this study, let us assume there is a single, primary story behind the accounts, and explore what kind of picture emerges as we compare them.

The story of Jesus' anointing is beautiful because it reveals the extraordinary love and gratitude of a woman who has found in Jesus the answer to life's questions. It is remarkable because, in that moment, almost every social custom shaping the relationship between women and men, let alone women and rabbis, was broken. Her presence, her touch, her actions and her attitude all reveal the extent of extravagant love. There is much in the stories of Jesus' and Mary's interaction that entices us and challenges us. The spontaneity of her behaviour, her willingness to move beyond accepted boundaries and her dedication all witness to the reality of a spiritually live relationship.

Text	John: 12:1-8	Matt 26:6-13	Mark: 14:3-9	Luke 7:36-50
Reactions				
What does the writer add/subtract				

Distinctiveness				
Power of story				

**Exceptional grace – Mary and Martha**

Luke 10:38-42.

- What does the description of Mary reveal about the posture of the disciple?
- Why is Mary’s choice better?
- Where do you see grace in the encounter?



**Explosive love – The resurrection of Jesus**

In each of the gospel accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus, special mention is made of the fact that the women who had been accompanying Jesus were at the cross, and that it was Mary Magdalene either alone (John and Mark), with one other (Matthew) or with the other women (Mark and Luke) who first discovered the resurrection.

In the third century, Hippolytus called Mary Magdalene “the apostle to the apostles.” She was certainly the first to discover that Jesus was not in the tomb and was the first to proclaim the event to the others. The biblical accounts carry the same essential story, but each bears a second level of meaning as an example to other people.

John 20:1-18.

- What does the group think of the interaction between Jesus and Mary?
- In what ways is it consistent with the other interactions we have explored?
- What pattern might we discern if we are considering a model of discipleship?
- What is the importance of her being named by Jesus?

**Follow by Ian Price**

**Like a child, stepping in her father’s footprint in the sand, I have tried to follow you.**

**But your stride is too large for my bounds, and I am left unsteady, teetering on the edge of my capacity.**

**Still, you draw me on – your strength, your certainty, your eye fixed upon the distant point.**

**Where are we going? It matters not, so long as holding each we journey on as one.**

**Step forth, and I will follow in your stead.**

*Reflect quietly on the poem.*

*To what extent can you identify with these words in your own journey of faith? In what ways do you feel you have encountered Christ, heard him name you, and been sent to be his witness? Where do you feel you need to be open to him? How does the model of Mary help?*

